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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000743

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/29/2027

TAGS: ENRG MNUC PARM PGOV TRGY BO

SUBJECT: SOSNY TRUST AND COOPERATION HIGH, SECURITY LOW

REF: MINSK 365

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4(b,d,e,f,g).

Summary

¶1. (C) The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) team continued its project with Belarus' Joint Institute of Power and Nuclear Research (JIPNR)--Sosny on the design of an upgraded Material Protection, Control and Accounting (MPC&A) system for the facility's nuclear material. The team also began exploring cooperation on developing a set of regulations to oversee the protection of the material. The level of trust and cooperation from the Belarusian side remains high. End summary.

¶2. (C) On August 13-17, the visiting U.S. Department of Energy project team (USPT) continued their joint MPC&A project with scientists at Belarus' JIPNR-Sosny nuclear research facility. The team consisted of Jacqueline McKisson of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), Robert Paulson from the Nonproliferation and Disarmament Fund (State/ISN/NDF), Stephen Mladineo, Brian Smith, and Troy Wright of the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL), and Keith Young of Sandia National Laboratories.

New Aspect - Regulations Development

¶3. (C) In June 2007, JIPNR-Sosny asked the USPT for assistance in the development of MPC&A regulations to support the security of the nuclear material at JIPNR-Sosny. The U.S. project team added regulatory development expert, Troy Wright to initiate discussions on adding a regulatory aspect to the project. The GOB recently scrapped existing Soviet-era regulations. Without a sustainable regulatory basis for MPC&A, MPC&A upgrades to JIPNR-Sosny will provide little long-term benefit, according to the USPT team.

Trust And Cooperation High, But Building 20 Still No Go

¶4. (C) The team noted that the atmosphere during this trip was collegial and trusting. USPT members and accompanying Poloff easily attained site access, and were again granted access to Building 40 to view the Yalina sub-critical assembly and spent fuel pool. The USPT expressed the opinion that the Sosny team members are committed to this project and clearly understand the need for it. The Sosny team also allowed USPT members to accompany an IAEA inspector to the sub-critical assembly while the inspector conducted samples to confirm no nuclear materials had been diverted.

¶ 15. (S) Authorities continued to deny access to Building 20 which houses Sosny's fresh fuel storage vault and the Hyacinth critical assembly, which is reportedly under development. One USPT member heard from a Sosny scientist that the reason may be that Sosny is currently conducting a joint project there with the Russian government. Authorities have stated that they will not grant access to the USPT for the installation of alarm equipment in building 20, however the site claims to have funding from the Hyacinth project budget for security upgrades, and has agreed to terminate the alarm and assessment system in the new Central Alarm Station.

Lax Security - Trust Too High?

¶ 17. (C) Although the high level of trust between the U.S. and Sosny teams is encouraging, it also highlights the lax security standards in place at the facility. During the tour of building 40, USPT team members were left unaccompanied through many parts of the facility, including the room adjacent to the Yalinasub-critical assembly room, which was open. The Sosny employees apparently trusted the US team member enough to allow unsupervised access to highly enriched fuel rods. This poor compliance with two-man rule provisions is a good example that highlights the need for training and an enforceable regulatory basis for the MPC&A program at the site.

¶ 18. (C) The spent fuel pool is located in a cavernous warehouse-like area. One section of the area is used for a medical bandage irradiation operation that Sosny runs to obtain supplemental income. Only an insubstantial ten-foot high fence -- that didn't even come close to reaching the

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fifty-foot high ceiling -- separated the several irradiation section workers from the spent fuel. (Comment: The lax security at Sosny is certainly not news. However, one USPT member stated, and the rest agreed, that security at Sosny is currently the worst of any sites they had seen in any of the former Soviet republics, and reminiscent of the situation that existed in most Russian facilities ten years ago. End comment.)

New ISTC Project Leader Significant Improvement

¶ 19. (C) During their last meeting in April (reftel), both the Sosny and USPT teams expressed dissatisfaction with the former project manager's performance. ISTC replaced him with a new project manager, Oksana Wolf. USPT team members agree that the personnel change has been advantageous to the process, and noted more efficient progress as a result. Of note, the first contract between the ISTC, JIPNR-Sosny and a subcontractor (New Wings) was signed during the visit.

Vendor Visit to Measuring Device Supplier

¶ 10. (C) Two members of the team and Poloff visited Atomtex, a Minsk-based supplier of radiation measurement and detection equipment as a possible provider of hardware to be used in the protection plan. The team reviewed the certification, delivery schedule, and technical specifications of the equipment, and seemed satisfied with the company's offerings for use in the project.

Comment

¶ 11. (C) Cooperation between Sosny and the USPT is continuing smoothly and Sosny representatives show an encouraging level of trust. Nonetheless, access to all facilities where equipment will be installed remains an issue. The regulatory aspect of the project should remain limited in scope to the protection and accountability of nuclear material in Belarus,

all of which currently exists at JIPNR-Sosny so as to ensure the GOB recognizes that USG support does not extend to construction of a new nuclear power plant.

¶12. (U) This cable has been cleared by Jacqueline McKisson of DOE.

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